

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee – 24 June 2015

Subject: Communities of Interest: Roma Community -
Roma Engagement and Reporting Opportunities

Report of: Strategic Director (Reform)

Summary

This report provides an overview on the Council's Roma engagement and reporting activities. The report gives historical and current examples of the Council's direct engagement activity, as well as that of its partner organisations and forums. It outlines some of the opportunities for future engagement and involvement of relevant stakeholders, and summarises the most effective reporting channels for the Council to articulate Roma community issues in Manchester.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to review and provide comment on the key equality issues identified.

Wards Affected: All

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 2 December 2014, officers and Elected Members of Manchester City Council met with representatives of an informal Roma Consultation Forum, which is supported by the MigRom Project. The MigRom Project ('The immigration of Romanian Roma to western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies') is a consortium that includes academic partners in the UK, Italy, France, Spain and Romania, as well as Manchester City Council and the European Roma and Traveller Forum. Funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework research programme, the project investigates the participation of Roma migrants in the fields of housing, services, employment and education, as well as local authority policies and engagement strategies with Roma migrants and public attitudes to Roma.
- 1.2 During the meeting, the Roma Consultation Forum expressed concerns about how Roma issues were articulated in several Council reports. It was agreed as an outcome of that meeting that the Council would work with a range of organisations that are engaged with Manchester's Roma communities, to inform its future reporting on Roma issues. It was further agreed that this interim report would be presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee, ahead of more detailed community issues being reported via the refreshed State of the City: Communities of Interest Report, which is scheduled for publication in March 2016.
- 1.3 This report provides examples of Roma engagement activity that the Council has undertaken to date, an indication of current practice and opportunities for future engagement and how outcomes will be reported. It does not investigate in detail particular Roma-related issues, as these will be addressed in the Communities of Interest Report.

2. Manchester City Council's Roma Strategy 2011 – 14

- 2.1 Manchester City Council's active engagement with Roma families was established around 2007, with the Council's International New Arrivals, Travellers and Supplementary Schools Team (INA/T/SS) working with the Roma community through schools enrolment. In spring 2009, in order to address issues of community cohesion and service provision in Gorton South, the Council set up a Gorton South Roma Strategy Group to improve coordination and engagement with the community.
- 2.2 In August 2009, the Council commissioned the Romani Project at the University of Manchester to carry out research in the Romani community of Gorton South. The project was asked to assess the aspirations of community members, their level of skills, their concerns and potential channels of engagement, and to make recommendations for an engagement strategy. The outcomes of this research were presented to Council officers in October 2009 and indicated that:

- The community of Romanian Roma in the area consisted of around 300-400 individuals, the majority of them children, who originated mainly from Tandarei in south-eastern Romania
- Most were related through family ties, and many adhered to the Pentecostal faith (it should be noted that the community has since grown to include unrelated families of Romanian Roma from other cities in Romania and of other faiths, whilst there was also a move of a significant number of Romanian Roma families based in the area away from Manchester in 2012)
- Families expressed a keen interest for their children to attend school but described obstacles such as a shortage of school places and inaccessibility of the registration process
- Families also expressed an interest in finding employment, although EU regulations at the time did not allow them to do so and restricted them to self-employment (these restrictions were removed in January 2014 and there has since been a significant increase in employment in the community).

2.3 Based on these findings, the University of Manchester made the following recommendations to the Council:

- To create two temporary positions for Roma outreach workers to support interaction with local services
- To support capacity building by training young people from the community, to create role models
- To draw on this capacity to engage Romani classroom assistants to support Roma pupils in local schools
- To raise awareness of the Roma community among local services and schools, through a series of training activities
- To strengthen provisions for school places and ensure equal access to education.

2.4 The Council responded to these recommendations with the development of the Roma Strategy 2011 – 14. Informed by the work of the Gorton South Roma Strategy Group, the city-wide strategy recognised the important role of community management, education and employment as key contributors towards successful and sustained integration. As a result, it delivered Council-led and partnership activities including:

- Supporting Roma families through the INA/T/SS Team to enrol their children into school, overcoming barriers where possible to ensure that more Manchester primary schools take Roma children; consequently, Roma families are now resident in every SRF area in the city except for Wythenshawe, and Roma children are engaged in education
- Engaging teenage Roma girls to assess circumstances relating to school attendance, marriage and family responsibilities; the MigRom Project advises that marriage is sanctioned in Romani communities through approval of the extended families and not necessarily through formal registration with state institutions and engagement on the topic

should be considered in this context; it further notes that this practice is not unique to Romani communities

- Engaging Roma under 5's in Sure Start activities to expand on the school enrolment work
- Supporting GMP's investigation into suspected human trafficking / sexual exploitation within the Roma community; the police investigation (Operation Epee), established that there was no child trafficking or sexual exploitation taking place
- Working with The Big Life Company Outreach Project, the Black Health Agency (BHA) for Equality, the University of Manchester, the INA/T/SS Team and MAES on the Big Life Company Outreach Project based at Longsight Sure Start, which focused on the skills development of Roma residents; the project supported seven young people from the Roma community to develop their literacy and numeracy skills and access work experience placements in local schools, following which all participants went on to work on a self-employed basis
- Working with the Manchester Citizen's Advice Bureau, the BHA and Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN) to manage the Migration Impact Fund (a £500,000 award funded via Government Office North West), to deliver advice and information services to ease the pressure on existing advice services within the city up to December 2011
- Coordinating a Roma Strategy group, which informed the activities of the strategy and assessed progress; a report on the Roma Strategy, compiled as part of the EU-funded MigRom project in March 2013, is available for review at:
<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/docs/Commentary%20on%20MCC%20document.pdf>

2.5 The University of Manchester advises that it has since continued to engage with a variety of services and schools, and the Big Life Company has continued its community engagement initiative in the form of reports and events. Equal access protocols have been established in a number of Manchester schools / across the education sector.

3. Current Engagement

3.1 Manchester City Council Services

3.1.1 The Council is committed to promoting independence and ensuring that emerging communities are able to access mainstream services, rather than developing reliance on targeted provision. The effectiveness of the short term, high intervention model outlined above, which promotes and enables independence in the longer term, has previously been evidenced through work with, for example, the City's Somali and Sudanese communities. The INA/T/ASS Team was disestablished in June 2014, ceasing a significant proportion of the targeted Roma intervention work above.

3.1.2 However, the Council retains a degree of designated focus on Roma engagement; the Education Casework Team continues to employ one part-

time officer to support newly arrived families, mainly Roma families from eastern Europe, to ensure children access education. Currently supporting 26 young people, the officer also works with other Council teams to bridge language barriers and ensure that Roma families are able to access relevant and sometimes complex services (i.e. the transport to school service).

- 3.1.3 In addition to the Roma-specific activity above, the Council continues to deliver services that are not Roma-targeted but which, because of their particular focus or geographical delivery, are relevant to and accessed by Roma communities. For example, The Manchester Youth and Play Fund provides funding to not-for-profit third sector voluntary and community organisations who work with young people aged 5-19 (up to 25 for specific vulnerable groups), to ensure access to positive services and activities for young people in Manchester. Great Places Housing Trust, who act and provide support as an umbrella organisation to Levenshulme Youth Project, is one of the organisations that is currently funded.
- 3.1.4 Levenshulme Youth Project works predominately in the Levenshulme and Gorton South Wards but also attracts young people from Longsight. The project's offer includes an open access youth club which is facilitated on a weekly basis from the New Covenant Church in Levenshulme on Tuesday evenings 7.30-9pm. These sessions are universal and open access and are attended, in the main, by Roma young men.
- 3.1.5 The staff and volunteers at this project have built up very good relationships with the Roma young men and several of the young people also attend the Levenshulme Youth Forum. The Youth Forum meets weekly on Wednesday evenings at ALL FM and have worked on a number of campaigns including making a short film about road / driving safety, logo design competition, attending a 'We Day' conference in London and a residential in the Lake District. These experiences were designed to create opportunities for personal development and challenge for young people.
- 3.1.6 Levenshulme Youth Project also received additional money from the Youth Fund Contingency money (£3,000) to develop some specific detached targeted work with Czech Roma young people in and around the A6 corridor during the summer 2014. This work has allowed the Youth Workers to develop some contacts and start to build up relationships with a different group of young people.
- 3.1.7 The Youth Project are also working with Voluntary Youth Manchester on a Public Health commissioned initiative looking at work with boys and young men. This includes exploring masculinity with a focus on cultural / traditional differences between Roma community and the indigenous population.

3.2 MigRom Project

3.2.1 The Council also remains involved in Roma engagement through its role on the MigRom Project Steering Group. Alongside the project's research component, a budget of around 250,000 Euros is allocated by the consortium specifically for outreach work within the community of Romanian Roma migrants in Manchester. This has enabled the project to engage two members of the local Roma community as outreach workers on a full-time basis. The outreach work is managed by the University of Manchester in partnership with the Council's Regeneration Team and Equality Team and other stakeholders through the joint Steering Group.

3.3 Equality Funding Programme

3.3.1 Through its Equality Funding Programme, the Council has also funded the BHA to use consultation and assertive outreach methods to investigate Roma communities' attitudes, aspirations and perspectives related to education, employment, rights, relationships and health and wellbeing. Using the intelligence gained, the BHA developed recommendations for:

- continuation of the outreach approach to increase the organisation's understanding of community needs and strengths;
- the delivery of multi-agency training sessions on Roma issues, and;
- the provision of healthy relationship workshops with Roma communities.

3.3.2 Although progress was made on the outreach and workshop activities before the conclusion of the agreed funding period at the end of March 2015, delivery of the multi-agency training has been carried forward into quarter 1 of 2015 - 16.

4. Opportunities for future Roma engagement in Manchester

4.1 In addition to the ongoing Roma engagement outlined above, further opportunities are currently under discussion or in the early stages of development:

4.2 Roma Consultation Forum and Roma Voices of Manchester

4.2.1 Part of the MigRom Project's schedule of deliverables is the Roma Consultation Forum. The project application submitted to the European Commission in 2012, which forms the basis of the project contract signed by the partners, contains the following description of the Consultation Forum:

"The study will be combined with a pilot engagement scheme led by a local authority – Manchester City Council. The scheme draws on Manchester's engagement strategy with the community of Roma migrants over the past few years. The project will expand this strategy by introducing further measures for capacity-building within the community, provisions for advice and support

services and the creation of a consultation forum that will allow Roma migrants to take part in planning and decision-making processes affecting their community. ... The [project's] outreach workers will support Council officials in setting up and running a regular consultation forum within the local Roma community which will act as a clearing house for issues with local services, authorities and non-Roma residents."

- 4.2.2 This deliverable was designed specifically in order to establish links between Manchester City Council and Roma community leaders. In June 2013 it was agreed that this objective would proceed initially by identifying individuals with an interest in acting as informal spokespersons for the community, and through gradually building their capacity. This process, which has included training events, film screenings and meetings with representatives of international Romani culture initiatives and with Elected Members and council officers, has resulted in a consolidated Roma Consultation Forum.
- 4.2.3 In discussion with the Roma Consultation Forum in the meeting of 2 December 2014, the suggestion was presented by Council officers that members of the Forum could engage with the Youth Council and / or House of Manchester initiatives. This suggestion offered a reciprocal arrangement, whereby Roma representatives could engage with the Council, and in turn would be supported to promote Roma voice. This suggestion was initially well received by the Roma Consultation Forum, although none of its members have subsequently engaged with the Youth Council or House of Manchester.
- 4.2.4 In May 2015, the MigRom Project announced the establishment of a Roma Community Group, Roma Voices of Manchester. The initiative is being supported through the MigRom Steering Group with input from the Council, the University of Manchester and other member organisations, in partnership with the Big Life Group and with additional support from the European Roma and Travellers Forum. The group is intended to be the channel to deliver the Consultation Forum. It will offer the Council and local institutions a way to gather views from the Roma community, and it will offer the community an opportunity to articulate needs and concerns in an organised fashion and thereby be a voice for the Roma community. It will also offer an opportunity to set up a community advice service that is Roma-led, drawing on the experience of the MigRom Project's outreach work.
- 4.3 Supporting Roma Voice Project
- 4.3.1 The BHA, the Roma Support Group (based in East London) and Migration Yorkshire are partners with Salford University in the Supporting Roma Voice Project, which commenced in May 2015. The project, funded for two years by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and The Migration Foundation, aims to support the inclusion of Central and Eastern European Roma populations within the UK through a rights based approach to gathering evidence and developing advocacy and leadership.

- 4.3.2 Delivery of the project is managed by BHA in Greater Manchester, Roma Support Group in East London and Migration Yorkshire in Sheffield. Salford University's Department of Social Work will be providing intensive training and support and will evaluate the project and its outcomes.

5. Future Roma reports

- 5.1 The Council regards the State of the City: Communities of Interest Report to be its foremost mechanism to report on equality / community issues in the City. It is intended that the Council will build on and utilise its relationships with a range of relevant organisations and forums to inform the Roma-related content of the next Communities of Interest Report. The report is scheduled for publication in March 2016. The Council's Equality Team is currently devising a refreshed approach to developing the report and will update Communities Scrutiny Committee throughout 2015 -16.
- 5.2 Further Roma-related reports for information will be presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee as relevant to the work-plan and as requested by the Chair. Joint working with relevant organisations and forums will again be utilised to inform the content of these reports, as appropriate.
- 5.3 One of the objectives of the Roma Voices of Manchester community group is to enable the dissemination of information regarding Roma communities to local service providers. The Council's role on the MigRom Steering Group will enable officers to support the successful establishment of the group. In return, the group will be able to articulate its developing understanding of Roma community issues to inform Council strategies and reports.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This report has summarised some of the Council's key engagement activities with the City's Roma communities and outlined current and developing work to build on this. It should be noted that this is a summary report and is not exhaustive of all Roma-related activity in the Council and in the City Region. However, it does indicate some of the opportunities that are available to the Council to best inform its Roma-related engagement and reporting and to build on established relationships with relevant agencies and communities.
- 6.2 The Council has been made aware by the organisations and services outlined in this report that there is sometimes disagreement between parties about the factual accuracy and the interpretations of what each has either reported to the Council or published independently. It will be important to the Council, in the development of the Communities of Interest Report and other Roma-related information, that it can reliably substantiate any information that it is presented with. Any unsubstantiated information will not therefore be included.

- 6.3 The Council will continue to work collaboratively with the relevant organisations and forums to manage effective working relationships and establish a reliable evidence-base. In the interest of effective engagement and reporting though, it will be important that these agencies are also able to work collaboratively together to provide opportunities to ratify any inconsistencies. The Council will play an active role in promoting this collaborative approach.
- 6.4 In addition, the Council will utilise the approaches and activities highlighted here to continue to ensure that Roma communities are able to access and engage with its universal services and initiatives.